

# North Kildonan United Church

July 31, 2022 ~Sheron Miller

## “Continuing in Hope”

*A Celebration of 60 years of the United Church Women in Canada*

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This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Church Women in Canada. In 1962 the Women’s Association and the Women’s Missionary Society amalgamated to form the United Church Women. Since that time, women have heard the spirit’s call and have answered in witness, study, fellowship and service. The theme for this anniversary celebration was “*Continuing in Hope.*”

Hope is often defined as an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one's life or the world at large. But what gives us hope today, what do we hope for and where do we find it. Hebrews 6:19 says “*we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure*” so we know that God is in control of the hope we hold.

Looking at our world today, hope seems to be a distant expectation. With world conflicts, devastating climate change and a pandemic that has not been eradicated, these challenges have eroded hope in many segments of society. In the church, we are dealing with smaller numbers which impacts much of the work we do.

But hope can be seen in the ministries dealing with the most vulnerable in society, those reaching out to assist refugees and those providing financial support to many parts of our world. These actions are examples of continuing in hope, remaining steadfast to our work, continuing within restrictions and challenges, finding new ways to fellowship, new ways to gather and study.

The women of the UCW have had to adapt to many challenges and changes over the past 60 years, finding new ways to witness to others and provide service where needed while remaining true to one goal – to be united in mission, study, fellowship and service.

And so, we gathered together two weeks ago in Sydney, Nova Scotia to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Church Women in Canada. Seven women from the Prairie to Pine region had registered but only three of us actually got there. Barb stayed with her family in Ontario for a much-needed rest and two ladies from Harrow United and one from St. Andrews River Heights had their flights cancelled with no suitable option provided.

Linda Buchanan from The Pas, Karen Corbett from Harrow United and myself held on to the hope long into Sunday night that we could get to Sydney on Monday. Thankfully, Air Canada managed to get us there safe and sound albeit at 3 in the morning.

On the beautiful grounds of Heritage Park and in the Membertou Trade and Convention Centre we met with over 230 women from across Canada, Bermuda and Zambia to celebrate this anniversary of the UCW. The hotel we stayed in was attached to the convention centre by a walkway making the location ideal. The staff in both locations - hotel and convention centre - were friendly and helpful and the event itself was really well organized. Despite the many travel glitches, the organizers remained patient and adapted to the delay issues.

This was evident on Tuesday afternoon when time was taken from the regular agenda for Karen to present the Prairie to Pine banner and sand from our region. Regions were invited to prepare banners which were displayed all around the main room of the convention centre providing a colourful background to the event. Each region was also asked to bring sand native to their community. Shirley May graciously collected sand from Ontario and Manitoba and Karen placed the sand in a tall vase on the mainstage. At the top of the vase was a candle which was lit every day. These were lovely symbols of the regions of Canada and Bermuda.

Also featured was a book room with available merchandise from the United Church Resource Centre and regions were able to set up displays. I was able to bring some pocket prayer squares, and city of Winnipeg and Province of Manitoba pins. Thank you to Peggy who made the squares and acquired the pins for our display. Whatever pocket prayer squares I could not take were sent to Linda Buchanan who ministers at Westminster Church in The Pas.

Our keynote speakers were Sally Armstrong, JD Kennedy, Women for Change Zambia representatives, and Rev. Alice Finnermore. Alice was also the music leader for the week sharing her lovely voice and musical talent to this event. Each session began with music and a short devotional.

Theme song was "Into your hands" with special words written by Alice. Into your hands we give our worries, into your hands we give our sorrows, family, neighbours and planet. Along with this theme song, we sang old hymns, newer hymns, choruses and spiritual songs. After each guest and in thanks we sang the blessing song "May the blessing of God be upon you."

Sally Armstrong is a human rights activist, journalist and award winning author. She has worked in this field for over 40 years travelling the world over, covering

stories about women and girls in zones of conflict. She was dynamic, interesting and fierce in her belief that women are the key to ending poverty, violence and conflict. She spoke on some of her travels in conflict seized areas where she saw examples of hope emerging.

One example which tugged at the heart strings of us all was her report of Polish women waiting at a train station with strollers for Ukrainian refugee mothers and their children. Truly a vision of hope. Relating many other examples of hope in the world she encouraged us to work for change. She asked us to look closely at conflicts and the pandemic as they are like x-rays showing the faults of society. She was a wonderful speaker for this event.

Rev. JD Kennedy spoke on *How to Comfort a Dying Friend*. Now, I have to admit I wasn't too keen on hearing this as I thought it would be a downer. Wrong. Rev. Kennedy used humour and his experience to present meaningful and useful advice on this topic. Using the letters from the word comfort, he illustrated valuable and helpful ways to provide comfort in different situations. His presentation was humorous, insightful and spirit filled.

Rev. Alice Finnamore shared her thoughts on "self-care in action." She spoke on her own personal journey with thoughtful reflection and humour. She spoke on helping others as a form of self-care, connecting with others, adding value and a sense of worth is hope in action.

Also presenting were two representatives from Women for Change Zambia. They provided a factual power point presentation and a history of the organization Women for Change which focuses primarily on education for women and girls. Women for Change is an NGO in operation since 1994 and is funded by many organizations around the world. \$103,000.00 from the United Church Women was presented.

Evenings were filled with special entertainment featuring drummers and dancers of the MicMaq nation (which we missed as we were still in some airport or another), a very funny comedian Patrick Ledwell, an evening of traditional Cape Breton fiddling and a wonderful musical presentation by The Men of the Deeps, a long standing choir whose members are miners.

Thursday evening was a banquet where guests of the region were invited for a special dinner and presentations. Rev. Michael Blair, General Secretary of the United Church of Canada was the keynote speaker. His address focused on the theme continuing in hope and the work of the UCW. He spoke on God's commitment to us through the promise of creation; that hope is trust in God because God never gives up.

He quoted the hymn will your anchor hold saying yes it will hold because of God's commitment to transforming our world; that God loves the world through us. He concluded his talk by singing a verse from the hymn "Precious Lord, Take my Hand." His address caused some lively discussion at our table with everyone agreeing we need congregations to continue in hope, dare justice, make bold decisions and build relationships.

This anniversary event prompted many discussions relating to the past, present and future of the UCW. It was wonderful to hear of activities some groups undertake and to share what our UCW has done. In many ways it demonstrated that the women of the church are dedicated, talented and determined. Determined to play an important role in maintaining the continuation of the UCW. Participation in events such as this anniversary celebration is our calling. To maintain our groups, foster new members, and to continue in witness, study, fellowship and service is our mandate, this is our hope.

Many of you know that I am an optimistic person. Along with that optimism is hope. Hope for conflict to end, hope that technology be used for good and not to exploit our children. Hope that we can be accepting of each other in all shapes and forms, that people will come to church and see God in action through us, that our children will come to love God through our teaching and service and through our witness see the saving grace of Jesus Christ. I pray that you too will continue in hope. Amen.